

THE  
ADVANTAGES  
OF

*Theatrical Entertainments*

BRIEFLY CONSIDERED.

——— *Ridentem dicere verum*  
*Quid vetat?* ——— HOR.

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Theoretical Emulation  
BRIEFLY CONSIDERED.

By  
Hos.



Printed by the

ON THE  
THEATRE.

**I**N every State, in which learning and politeness have made any considerable progress, *Theatrical Performances* have met with a favourable reception.—Among the Athenians, who were esteemed the most wise, the most learned and polite people in the world, theatrical representations were in the highest repute, and had the greatest ascendant over the minds of the people: for, we are informed by history, that Socrates, who in former times had maintained a fair character, and was always held in the greatest esteem by the Athenians, being represented in a ridiculous light, in one of the plays of Aristophanes, even this great man became contemptible amongst his countrymen, which afterwards was the occasion of his disgraceful condemnation. Such was the power of that comedian!

In like manner, these shews were very

much encouraged among the Romans, who were reckoned the next to the Greeks in point of taste and politeness. Among them flourished Terence, so renowned for his ingenious plots, instructive morals, and natural descriptions, who, with many others of no less reputation, entertained and instructed the Roman people with the highest approbation.

And may we not observe, that as soon as our own country had emerged from a state of ignorance, superstition, and enthusiastic zeal for religion, when learning and politeness took place, a passion for theatrical entertainments soon followed; and are, at this period, in a very flourishing condition, and frequented by people of every rank and denomination.

But, as some persons have conceived great prejudices against this instructive amusement, and thereby are deprived of one of the most pleasing entertainments; it is my design, to present some incitements (to such persons) to frequent the Theatre, principally drawn from the consideration of the characters of the theatrical performers.

And first, when we consider the great diligence and unwearied assiduity with

which they labour to promote the interest of virtue, to reform the manners, and to improve the social feelings, they certainly deserve our highest approbation, and most constant encouragement: and much more so, when we consider, that they are not actuated by any selfish or avaricious principles. Food and raiment is all they desire; and, at their departure from a city, they perhaps are not one farthing richer than when they arrived at it, altho' they have been the happy instruments of introducing a great many polite practices, though vulgarly denominated *Irregularities*, and which even some ill-natured critics are apt to call by the name of *Vices*; though, at the same time, they are the highest improvements and refinements of human nature: especially the practice of gallantry, which has been so nobly promoted by these gentlemen, is of very great moment in every civilized nation, as it polishes the manners, divests man of that natural ferocity, which is so disagreeable to every person of true delicacy. This practice seems to be the natural result of that original law of nature, which has placed a mutual affection betwixt the two sexes, and discovers itself in

all the tender offices of love and kindness. Since this is the case, are they not highly to be commended for their industry to promote this noble end?

But their ingenuity in representing the various scenes of human life is no less wonderful. Thus they represent with the greatest exactness and propriety, the tumults of the guilty soul, the passionate sighs of the lover, or the emotions raised in the mind by squint-eyed jealousy: and, with what majesty does the counterfeit monarch stalk along! with what well-acted austerity does he issue out his commands! or, if a God is to appear, a mortal presently starts into a Deity, and bids thunders roll, and lightnings flash the skies. These sons of Proteus appear in a thousand different forms: he who to-night is a lowly peasant, or a poor grave-digger, to-morrow struts about in purple majesty, and accompanied with a numerous train of attendants: he who, in one part of the night, represents an old woman bowed down with age, with wrinkled brow and hollowed eyes, in another part of the night represents a young stripling all in the bloom of youth, with health glowing on his cheeks, and sparkling in

his eyes: he who to-night represents the simple peasant, telling over his artless tale, to-morrow, with the greatest solemnity pronounces the prescriptions of the Physician, or the commands of the Prince.

These gentlemen arrive at a pitch of virtue, to which few, who are employed in speculation, attain to: They reduce theory to practice. The delusive scenes of love exhibited on the stage, are performed by them in real life, in other places. The person who acts the part of what they call a *man of honour*, evidently shows to the world that he has imbibed very much of that magnanimous spirit; for, on account of the smallest offence, he will challenge his nearest friend to a duel: he who makes an elopment with a fair girl in the play, by his artful and persuasive harangues, seduces the daughter of some rich citizen, and secures the beloved coffer of the wealthy father: the propriety of which conduct will easily appear to all who have any degree of the theatrical spirit.

Indeed, they are not over scrupulous in an attachment to the *precepts of religion*, as their minds are opened by the free and generous sentiments expressed in the plays;

and as they firmly believe, that none of their little failures will be punished by God, who is goodness itself; and therefore, he will never punish his creatures for the enjoyment of these things which he has bestowed upon them, and the gratification of these desires which he hath implanted in them, seeing they particularly obey that command, *love one another*, which is of so great importance in the Christian system. It is true, they sometimes exercise the rhetoric of *oaths* and *blasphemies*; yet this does not proceed from any intention of the heart, but only from a habit contracted in the acting of these plays, where this polite language is interspersed.

And it is certain, that they cannot be called ostentatious in the practice of virtue; for they conceal their real merit from the eyes of men, which is a piece of as great self-denial as can be exercised. The Sabbath, that day of rest, affords none to them: for, in general, it must be spent in a preparation for their future appearances, that so they may be enabled to communicate their instructions with pleasure and satisfaction to the spectators. Disinterested men indeed! that without exception of

days they should thus labour for the public good: that, laying aside all regard for their own ease and tranquillity, they should thus endeavour to mend the heart. And how can that day be better spent than in a preparation of such means as may be most effectual to promote the interests of virtue, to confirm its votaries in their noble resolution, and to eradicate every base principle from their fellow-creatures?

Again, when we consider, the *extensive employment* which they afford to that illustrious set of mortals the *Tailors* and the *Barbers*, who are absolutely necessary to render them fit to appear in a proper manner before the spectators, it must highly enlarge our esteem and approbation of these gentlemen.— But their benign influence extends not only to the lower class of mankind, but to persons of a far more exalted station, and even to those who instruct mankind from the pulpit. How much more might these persons affect the hearts of their hearers with a love of goodness and virtue, with a hatred to all vice and immorality, if they had a more abundant share of that eloquence with which the theatrical performers are generally possessed of? for, do we not see that theatrical audiences are of-

ten melted into tears by the affecting manner in which fictitious calamities are represented? But how seldom is this the case in our religious assemblies! There the most important truths, and those which most highly concern us, are spoken, but the audience in general is cold and unaffected. And whence does this difference arise, but from the different manner in which the actor and the preacher express themselves? The former speaks with vehemence and feeling; and the latter delivers his elaborate harangues with coldness and indifference. And for the proof of this, we may appeal to matter of fact; for, do we not see, that those preachers, who in their younger days have frequented this school of eloquence, always attract the attention of the audience, and affect them in a greater degree?

Another very strong inducement to attend the Theatre, is, that it is a most effectual method to pass away the time *agreeably*; and to spend those hours for our instruction, which otherwise would be employed for our own disadvantage in particular, as well as of mankind in general. For, it is well known, that a life of inactivity is of all others the most disagreeable, and has a natural tendency to make men

fall into some bad pursuit, or pernicious exercise: but are not these inconveniences prevented by attending the theatre? There the spirits are rendered lively, and the time slides away in the most imperceptible manner; and while the most agreeable pleasure is attained, the most rational improvement is not wanting. For now, instead of the mind's being in a listless inactivity, it is roused into a generous concern for afflicted virtue and innocence; instead of falling into some unworthy pursuit, the heart is bettered, and the nobler feelings of the mind improved. But tho' by the greater number of those who attend the Theatre these advantages are not always attained; though perhaps they are little more enamoured with virtue than before; yet it is most certain, that this great advantage is attained, that they never fail to become acquainted with all the *various vices* which have been practised by mankind; and of the most proper and concealed manner of putting their designs in execution: and of how much advantage this is to every person, the ingenious reader will easily perceive.

But there is another consideration, which, I presume, will have no small influence on those who are concerned for the

interest of virtue; and that is, they give us many *instructive lessons*, which are of the greatest utility in the conduct of life. I shall endeavour to give an example of this, in a well known Play, the plot of which is shortly this: There were two brothers, both possessed of the spirit of gentlemen; the elder, in process of time, obtained the title of *Lord*; the younger, in the meantime, was improving his mind by travelling. At this time my Lord contracts an acquaintance with an old country gentleman, who had an only daughter, whom he kept as recluse as a vestal. This young Lady was promised in marriage to this Lord, though they had never seen one another; and a time for celebrating the nuptials is appointed.—At this period, the younger brother comes home, with all the accomplishments necessary to complete the character of a fine gentleman. However, as his money was gone, he was not very affectionately received by his elder brother. The young gentleman being incensed at this usage, attempts every method to be revenged on his brother; and being informed of his intended marriage, according to the advice of an old master in gallantry, he sets out with his brother's equipage to the old gentleman's

country seat, where he was received in a manner suitable to his dignity; but lest he should be discovered he gets the marriage knot tied in a private manner by the chaplain. But at his brother's arrival he was obliged to make his retreat as soon as possible: but not discouraged at this misfortune, in concert with his superannuated gallant, he repairs to the house where his brother was to receive his bride; and, by the united testimony of the young Lady's nurse, and the chaplain of the family, he recovers his spouse.

Every one's own reflection will easily discover a number of very instructive and useful lessons in this play: as for example, we may observe of how great service it is to be initiated into the paths of *gallantry* in the time of youth; for, by this means, when people come to more advanced years, they will be able to assist young gentlemen of high spirit, and such as fortune frowns upon; and by this means they exercise the noblest benevolence to others: and though they are not capable of practising these fates of gallantry, which do so much honour to human nature; yet, by their advice to others, they are of the greatest service to this worthy cause. Nay, more

must we not admire the conduct of this young gentleman in studying a just revenge against his brother? As this temper of mind is highly advantageous, it is a noble mean of deterring persons from doing injuries to others, and at the same time is a mark of a noble and generous spirit, which will not tamely submit to injuries: but according to the original law of self-preservation, he will study revenge against every person who hath offered him any insult. But another part of his conduct is no less worthy of our praise and commendation, and that is his manner of treating the old gentleman in regard to his daughter: for what can be more laudable than to rescue a young virgin from a state of captivity, to enjoy the sweets of love and liberty? And what can be more excellent, and at the same time more profitable, than by this means to get the money out of the hands of these close-fisted misers, who are ignorant how to use their wealth, and whose condition is quite the reverse of these of whom the Poet says,

*Dii tibi divitias dederunt artemque fruendi?*

And does not this Play give a very good hint to the young Ladies, who may be confined in the same manner as this fair

one in the play, to make an elopment with the first cliver fellow who comes in their way?

Now, since this one play affords so many useful hints, how many valuable instructions must be contained in the great variety of plays which are now printed, and frequently represented? For, do they not all abound with the most elegant descriptions of Beaus, of elopments, of old fathers deceived by their daughters, fair Ladies deceived by false lovers, husbands intriguing with young girls, and wives with young gallants? And many other things of like consequence; the thorough knowledge of which, is of so much advantage, and affords so much real satisfaction and improvement.

Thus I have pointed out, a few of the many *singular advantages* that arise from attending the Theatre. And now to conclude; certainly every person, who is desirous to have his mind improved in every thing virtuous and praise-worthy, will attend this school of virtue. And, no doubt, every person who is possessed of a true spirit of charity and generosity will be induced to give encouragement to these polite and instructive gentlemen, who, by the caprice of fortune, or by some of their own

failures (which the good and feeling heart will easily pardon) are reduced to very straitened circumstances, and will inevitably fall into all the extremity of want, unless they are supported by such persons as are possessed of a spirit of this nature.—Now, from the consideration of all these arguments, it will appear plain and evident, that theatrical entertainments are of the highest advantage to the nation in general, and to every individual in particular; and therefore, the performers ought to be encouraged, and applauded: for certain it is, that notwithstanding the amazing progress of these gentlemen in the practice of virtue, they will spend neither time nor pains for the instruction of mankind, unless their laborious efforts are crowned with proper rewards. And there is certainly no period, wherein those gentlemen's laudable zeal, for the benefit of mankind, ever appeared in such a conspicuous light, as their profering their service at this time, in order to revive the sinking spirits of the inhabitants of this city, so much depressed by the late failures, and the present general stagnation of trade and commerce, and to eradicate the gloomy thoughts thereof totally from their minds.

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